Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2010
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe,
log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org
and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org
and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to
subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the
following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #1237 09/10/10

~ 'Here You Have' Virus! ~ People Are Talking! ~ 2011 Norton Line!
~ Cybercrime Is Rampant! ~ Captive's Twitter Ruse ~ AOL's 'Safe Social'!
~ Subpoenas for Net Users ~ Google Instant Search! ~ Net Neutrality News!

~ Web Pages Talk, Listen ~ 9-5 Workday Is Killed? ~ PlayStation Turns 15!

-* Exploding Google Logo Means? *-
-* Online Prostitution Is Unstoppable? *-
-* Polls: Netizens Oppose Craigslist Censorship *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

I don’t have a lot of time this week; and this issue is already late to "get to press" so I can get it out at a reasonably late fashion. I had a few things to mention this week, but time is of the essence. I’m glad that Joe mentioned the ongoing saga down in Florida regarding the "threat" of Korans being burned on the anniversary of the attacks on September 11th. Definitely a story that will be watched closely on Saturday.

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Mother Nature knows that the "unofficial" end of summer has come and gone with last week’s holiday, and she’s rewarded us with a string of nice cool days with lower humidity and some sun.

It’s kind of nice to be able to go out and do a little bit of yard work and not sweat like a pig after several months of it.

Of course, we haven’t had a lot of rain this past week either, and that’s kind of nice, but I’m sure we’ll end up paying for it in the end... something about the next maple syrup season being affected by it or this fall’s pumpkin crop suffering... for the third straight season. Don’t ask me how I know that off the top of my head, I just do.

But there are crazy things going on all over the place these days. I really shouldn’t lump it in the "Crazy Things" category, but I’ve been watching the news stories about the preacher in Florida who was going to hold a "Koran Burning" this weekend.

This strikes me as particularly troubling; that a professed man of God would take to burning the holy book of another religion. I don’t care that

it’s different from what he believes... or what I believe, for that matter. It’s a holy book to someone and treating it with such disrespect, whether you follow that particular religion or not, is just wrong for anyone, let alone a "man of God".

I guess that his personal copy of the bible had suffered a similar fate. Maybe it had been a victim of someone who had torn specific pages out of it. For instance, the passages about ’doing unto others’ and ’judge not, lest ye be judged’.

It just amazes me that a pastor of a church... okay, so his church only has about 50 members... so what? He professes to be a leader in footsteps of someone who taught tolerance and understanding. I guess a lot of people miss that part. I guess it’s easier to say you’re defending something than to admit that being understanding and tolerant isn’t always easy.

Now, as for the Muslims that want to build a mosque (actually, it’s being called an "Islamic Study Center", but I’m going to call it "the mosque" for brevity) 2 blocks from the sight of the biggest terrorist attack in our history, I would say that they have the RIGHT to do so.

We are not, as many will tell you over and over again, a Christian nation. We may be a nation of (primarily) Christians, but we are, above and beyond that, a nation of laws. It is the law that makes us special and that makes many in other countries yearn to come here. It really IS the land of opportunity. And I say "primarily" because we’ve got to remember that we don’t have a ’State Religion’. In reality, we’re a nation of Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and many more. I DO find it somewhat heartening that we are able to get along as well as we do... in other countries, there have been decades-long struggles between subsets of the same religion that have left both the countries and religions bloodied and diminished. I’m not saying we’re perfect by any means, but we’ve taken a another step.

But, as with most good things, there IS a down-side. There is a responsibility that goes along with every right each of us has. Do they have the right to build a mosque there? Yes, they do. They own the property, they would not be breaking any zoning laws to do it, and they can evidently pay for all the construction they are planning. So yes, they do have the right.

But I do wonder at the wisdom of building a mosque there, regardless of whether or not they can. Not only for the reason you might think, though. You’re probably thinking that it’s only 2 blocks from ’Ground Zero’ and whether they intend it to or not, it inflames and hurts not only people who lost someone in the attack, but the city and country as a whole. And you’re right. It would be a painful reminder. But over and above that, is a place like lower Manhattan really the best place to build a mosque? I mean, property values alone are insane in that area. If they were of a mind to, I am sure the owners of the "mosque property" could do much better financially by selling the property and buying in a different area of the city. I’m sure that, even only 2 or 3 miles away, property costs would be much less.

But, of course, they seem to have the money required to do what they’re wishing to do, so that’s not an issue to them. Well, as I said, even if I don’t agree with their decision, they do have the right to do it. I’ve only seen little bits and pieces of the plans for the place, but it looks like a lovely building, and would be a credit to anyplace they decided to build it.

Now on to our friendly Florida pastor. First of all, what needs to be pointed out is that Reverend Terry Jones, Pastor of the Dove World Outreach Center has, to my knowledge, never said that his proposed Koran burning was in response to or brought about because of the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy. He has, however, said that the Koran is ’evil’ because it incites violent behavior and puts forth something other than "biblical truth".

I will be quite honest and tell you that I don’t know enough about Islam to say anything at all about their beliefs or practices. But why should I have any opinion on it at all? It is not my religion. I will leave that to those who do know more and follow my own religion which tells me to treat others as you want to be treated and to try to understand differences instead of simply condemning them.

The problem here is that Pastor Jones also has the right to do what he wants, as long as he’s not harming anyone else. I guess if the Korans he burns turn out to be stolen, he could be dealt with, or if Gainesville has an ordinance against burning in the open or something, he could be stopped, but the fact remains that he has the right to do it.

And one of the last things I’ve heard is that that tiny church in the sleepy little town of Gainesville (my apologies to Ray Stevens) is now getting threats. And I don’t have any hard proof.. or even reporting on it, but I’ll guaran-darned-tee you that the threats (if they are indeed real) are not all from incensed Muslims, but from people with friends and relatives, sons and daughters, wives and husbands and fathers and mothers working abroad in places that would be sure to feel the sting of something as insensitive as a ’Koran burning’. Now mind you, I don’t condone death threats to anyone, from anyone. I don’t think it’s a particularly effective way to get your point across, and I think it defeats the purpose of most religions in the first place.

Now let me finish up by saying that I probably wouldn’t be doing what either "side" is doing. But I’m not them, and I’m not judging either of them.

Pastor Jones has now announced that the Koran burning has now been canceled (although he’s gone back and forth on whether is is or isn’t). Although he says it was because he’d been promised that the "Ground Zero Mosque" would be moved, the "mosque people" say that isn’t so. Actually, I don’t care why it was called off, as long as it HAS been called off.

Personally, I would have called it off after realizing how much of an insult it would have been to Muslims, not just in the United States, but throughout the world. And the fact that the mosque isn’t being moved shouldn’t enter into it. You know.. that whole "turn the other cheek" thing.

But the fact remains that Pastor Jones has called off the Koran burning. I DO think that’s a good first step, no matter what the actual reason. And at the risk of dragging another religion into the ordeal, there’s a Taoist (I think) saying that a journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step.

That’s it for this week, friends and neighbors. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

=~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Halo: Reach Aims To Grab Gamers Again!
PSJailbreak Now Blocked?
Sony PlayStation Turns 15!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

'Halo: Reach' Aims To Grab Gamers Again

Since fans lined up at midnight nearly three years ago for the release of the last "Halo" video game, a recession struck the economy, President Barack Obama took office and "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2" became the best-selling shooter game of all time. When the prequel "Halo: Reach" debuts Sept. 14, it will land on a very different world.

"Halo" achieved status as a cultural phenomenon in 2007 with Master Chief, the armored hero of the original trilogy, adorning french fry wrappers, soda cans and a race car. The sci-fi shoot-'em-up saga became a cash cow for Microsoft Corp., spawning novels, toys and apparel, and boosting sales of Xboxes, the only consoles where "Halo" can be found.

"It's among the elite video game franchises," said NPD gaming industry analyst Anita Frazier. "It's among the Top 20 of all video game properties with relatively few releases compared to some of the other franchises. 'Halo 2' and 'Halo 3' are both among the Top 20 games ranked on total unit sales, and the original 'Halo' is among the Top 50 games."

However, in the three years since Master Chief was put to bed by Bungie Studios, much has changed along the gaming landscape, especially in the popular shooter genre. "Call of Duty," the aging war simulator from Activision Blizzard Inc., reclaimed hardcore gamers' attention with the contemporary "Modern Warfare" series from developers Infinity Ward.

"The game that's going to suffer from fatigue the most is 'Call of Duty' because everybody played that a year ago," said Wedbush Morgan gaming industry analyst Michael Pachter. "They haven't seen a brand new 'Halo' game in three years. I think three years between iterations is actually just enough time to get people excited about playing 'Halo' again."

It probably won't be enough to gun down the latest chapter in the

recharged "Call of Duty" franchise though. Pachter anticipates that over 6 million copies of "Reach" will be sold this year, on par with the 2007 sales of "Halo 3," while he predicts that over 12 million copies of developer Treyarch's "Call of Duty: Black Ops" will be sold by year's end.

"This is the first time we've ever had a 'Halo' game with any real competition," he added.

"Reach" is slated to be the last "Halo" entry developed by Bungie Studios, which signed an exclusive 10-year deal earlier this year with Activision to publish and distribute a series of games for various platforms. The deal marks Bungie Studios' first partnership since breaking off in 2007 from Microsoft, who retains the rights to the "Halo" universe.

"It could've been a game we phoned in," said Marcus Lehto, creative director at Bungie Studios. "It could've been our last game, and we just said, 'OK! This is our last "Halo." Goodbye!' We didn't want to do that. You'd think we're crazy, because we went back and decided that the 'Halo 3' engine wasn't capable of accommodating the vision we had for 'Reach.'"

Lehto and his team have slipped into a different, more personalized direction with "Reach." Instead of personifying genetically enhanced Spartan super-soldier Master Chief, players become Noble Six, a mysterious new member of the Noble Team, a group of hardened Spartans tasked with deterring The Covenant alien force from obliterating the planet Reach.

"One of the things we wanted to do with 'Reach' is to allow players to truly invest themselves in their Spartan character, and make their own unique Spartan," said Lehto. "When you first put in the disc to play 'Reach,' you will be prompted to begin that customization process and continue to customize your character as you continue to play."

Noble Six can be a man or a woman and outfitted with hundreds of different armor, color and emblem combinations, as well as grab special gadgets like jet packs, invisible camouflage and holograms along the way. Lehto hopes that more chances for players to fashion their character means this "Halo" game will reach beyond just young male shooter fans.

The intergalactic protagonist also has a past as a pilot, providing players with the opportunity to take to the skies - and beyond - for the first time in a "Halo" game. Lehto said the team at Bungie Studios packed as many such dramatic moments into the single-player campaign and amped up the multiplayer mode knowing that this would be their last "Halo."

"We really never anticipated it becoming this big," said Lehto. "There was so much responsibility on our shoulders to make sure that 'Reach' is the best of all the 'Halo' games. We put every bit of effort we could into this game. While we're happy that it's done, and we're proud of what we created, we're really sad to say goodbye to the 'Halo' universe."

PlayStation 3 Firmware Update Blocks PSJailbreak?

Sony has quietly released a firmware update to the PlayStation 3 that,

according to initial reports, blocks the now-infamous PSJailbreak exploit that enabled users to copy games to local storage devices and run home-brew applications on their game consoles. Sony is offering no specific information about the update, saying only that it ’includes additional security features.’

PSJailbreak appeared in mid-August as the first serious threat to Sony s copy-protection regime on the PlayStation 3 console - and, unlike traditional modchips that alter a game console, PSJailbreak was just a USB dongle: hook it up to the console and users could do things Sony forbids, like copying games to the internal hard drive or running custom applications.

An Australian court quickly shut down sales of PSJailbreak and ordered inventory turned over to Sony.

However, Sony s firmware update comes just a day after reports that PSJailbreak has been ported to USB-enabled mobile phones, including the Nokia N900 and the Palm Pre. With the PSJailbreak software, users can reportedly just connect their devices to the PlayStation 3 console using a USB cable to circumvent Sony s restrictions.

Reports are also circulating that Sony can detect network game players who are using PSJailbreak and opt to ban them from PlayStation Network.

Sony PlayStation Turns 15

Would you like to feel old? The PlayStation gaming console celebrated its 15th birthday Thursday, and Sony published a trip down memory lane to celebrate.

The PlayStation made its debut in North America on Sept. 9, 1995, almost a year after it landed in Japan. The first generation console was on the market for five years before Sony released the PS one in September 2000, which boasted an internal structure that was a third of the size of its predecessor, Sony said.

One month later, Sony released its popular PlayStation 2. It included a 128-bit CPU, dubbed the "emotion engine," and a graphics processor that, at the time, was more powerful than the average PC. It was the first console to include a DVD player and the ability to play CDs.

The original PlayStation still had some legs, however. By May 2004, it sold 100 million units worldwide, the first video game console to achieve that feat.

In 2005, Sony took the PlayStation on-the-go with the March 24 launch of the PlayStation Portable (PSP) . It included an LCD screen and let users watch movies in addition to playing games. It also included built-in wireless networking for Internet access and team play.

The 2006 holiday season saw the release of the PlayStation 3, which included a Blu-ray disc player and built-in hard disk drive. The new console supported downloadable games and other digital content available through the PlayStation Network. A lighter and more compact PS3 was released last year for $299.

The next-generation PSP hit the market in September 2007 with a lighter, smaller frame. The PSP 3000 came along in August 2008, and included a revamped LCD screen and built-in microphone for apps like Skype.

In September 2009, the PS2 reached over 140 million units sold. A month later, Sony released the PSP go, which featured a slide-out design and 16GB of storage.

Later this month, Sony will release the PlayStation Move motion controller. For more details, see PCMag's full review of the device.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

1 'Censored' Bar Won't Stop Online Prostitution

Craiglist's "adult services" section has been shut down in the U.S., but prostitution on the Internet is alive and well - even, quite possibly, on Craigslist.

Users of the website and its CEO grouse that the Internet is still full of sites where people can find prostitutes. As for the massive online classifieds site itself, many personal ads, which remain on the site, appear to be thinly veiled solicitations of sex for sale.

State attorneys general had pressed Craigslist to do more to block potentially illegal ads promoting prostitution, and hailed the company's decision to take down its adult services section on Saturday. But like other illegal online activities targeted with prosecution or lawsuits, including gambling, child pornography and unauthorized music downloads, shutting down one outlet simply sends many users running to others.

John Palfrey, a Harvard University law professor and co-director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, said the move from Craigslist was still a victory because it moved the ads off a highly visible location.

"Will people be able to find these ads online? The answer is almost certainly," he said. "Will they be able to find these on legitimate sites? I think the answer is probably not."

It's unclear if the shutdown is permanent. A black bar reading "censored" remained in place on the company's U.S. pages late Sunday. Erotic services ads on non-U.S. sites were still active.

Neither Craigslist CEO Jim Buckmaster nor a company spokeswoman responded to e-mails and phone calls seeking comment on Sunday. The company previously said it would issue a statement on the matter, without saying when.

Attorneys general from 17 states sent Craiglist a letter last month demanding that it take down its adult services section, saying the company was not doing enough to deter prostitution and child trafficking. Whether Craigslist could be found liable is a murky legal issue, but pressure on the company grew after some highly publicized incidents where authorities said encounters set up through Craigslist ended in violence and even death.

A former medical student, Philip Markoff, was accused of killing a masseuse he met through Craiglist. He committed suicide last month in the Boston jail where he was awaiting trial.

Craigslist, which is largely free, has been under prosecutors' scrutiny for years. It tried to police the postings on its adult services page by charging a fee to post the ads and requiring them to be vetted and approved. The section carried ads for a variety of erotic services, including personal massages and a night's companionship, which critics say veered into prostitution.

Some ads still carried in Craigslist's personals section look like they could fall in similar territory. "I am the perfect lunchtime or after-5 companion for businessmen that jet-set, work long hours or have family obligations," read one ad in the casual encounters section, appearing to advertise massages.

Craiglist's personal ads, which are free, are not regularly vetted. M. Ryan Calo, a senior research fellow at the Center for Internet and Society at Stanford Law School, said ads for sexual services could become harder to monitor if they begin migrating back into the personals.

It also could be more challenging for law enforcement to pick out the illegal ads.

"Instead of being in a small stream, it's going to be in a big ocean," Calo said.

Those trying to sell sex who give up on Craiglist have many other sites to choose from. As Craigslist users complained about the company's move in postings Sunday, some rattled off the names of other sites where they could find the same services.

Getting such ads removed from other sites is the next goal, said Malika Saada Saar, executive director of the Rebecca Project for Human Rights, a group that has been involved in pressuring Craigslist to block adult services ads.

"The issue isn't going after a particular company," Saar said, "the issue is going after children being sold for sex online."

Palfrey said Craiglist's decision is likely to cause operators of other online classified pages to think twice about the ads on their sites. Backpage.com, an online classifieds page similar to Craigslist owned by the alternative newspaper chain Village Voice Media, has an "adult entertainment" section that is highly explicit and features ads for a wide array of sexual services.

In a May blog post, Craigslist's Buckmaster said the company's ads were no worse than those published by Village Voice Media. He cited one explicit ad that included the phrase: "anything goes $90."

Polls Show Netizens Oppose Craigslist Censorship

Web-based polls and views express online show popular opinion is against the censoring of adult services ads on Craigslist. A poll at Mashable shows 71 percent of the respondents voted no to the question "Should Craigslist's Adult Services be censored?" Meanwhile, the Washington Post asked its readers, "Do you agree with Craigslist's decision?" to block access to its Adult Services section. Fifty-two percent of them said no.

At last count, 1989 people participated in the Mashable poll. Thirty-three of them believed Adult Services shouldn't be censored because prostitution is illegal; 22 percent opposed censorship because they believed existing policies at the service were sufficient in dealing with prostitution; and 16 percent voted no "for another reason."

Of those supporting censorship, 19 percent felt it should be done because Craigslist is indirectly profiteering from prostitution. The service charges $10 for an ad in the section and $5 for a renewal. This year, it's estimated Craigslist will earn $44 million from the section, or a third of all its revenues. Another 10 percent endorsed censorship "for other reasons."

The Post poll garnered 2089 respondents. Thirty-six percent of them agreed with the decision to block off the section because the ads were inappropriate. Another 12 percent "sort of" supported the decision because they felt the company should have taken better steps to police the ads.

The brass at Craigslist have been mum on the shutdown since they stopped taking advertising for the section and replaced its links on landing pages throughout the United States with the word "censored" in white type on a black background. That graphic treatment makes the word very prominent on the relatively drab pages. It has also led to speculation that there's more behind the shutdown than a unilateral capitulation to the forces of morality.

Some quarters have argued that the shutdown is a high stakes public relations ploy by Craigslist to win support for reopening the section, which is alive and well under its old nomenclature "Erotic Services" on the company's sites outside the United States. Last year, in an action designed to blunt pressure to stop taking adult-oriented ads from a number of Attorneys General, Craigslist shuttered its Erotics Services category in the United States and replaced it with an Adults Services one.

It's easy to see why such a ploy would be very risky. While the shutdown will raise an expected hue and cry from the civil libertarian set, it will also associate Craigslist in the mind of many in the public who get their news only through headlines as an ally of sex peddlers, prostitutes and traffickers of women and children.

Whatever Craigslist's motives for blocking access to Adult Services, the move may be more sizzle to steak because there are signs that the ads are moving into other areas of the network. On Sunday, ads alluding to cash exchanges for sexual services and seeking massage clients could be found in the Casual Encounters section of the service's websites, according to ABC News.

Cybercrime Is Rampant Around the World, Says Study

A new study by security vendor Symantec reports that Internet crime has grown into a widespread problem globally. It also provides intriguing insights into consumers' lax attitudes toward online piracy, plagiarism, and other illegally or unethical activities.

Some 7,000 adults in 14 nations participated in the Norton Cybercrime Report: The Human Impact, which was released Wednesday.

The study says that cybercrime is quite commonplace; more than 65 percent of participants say they've been a victim of online crime, including virus or malware attacks, online scams, phishing, social network profile hacking, credit card fraud, and sexual predation.

Malware attacks, which have affected just over half of all respondents, are by far the most common form of cybercrime. With more serious offenses, however, the victim rate drops dramatically. For instance, just 10 percent of adults say they've fallen prey to online scams, and a mere 7 percent have experienced credit card fraud.

China tops the list of online crime hotspots; 83 percent of respondents there have been victimized. Brazil and India tie for second at 76 percent; and the U.S. is third at 73 percent.

For businesses, the Norton report has some thought-provoking implications. Just over a quarter (28 percent) of adults worldwide expect to be defrauded online, and nearly nine out of ten (86 percent) think about cybercrime.

While the latter statistic isn't too shocking - after all, being aware of criminal activity is a pretty good self-defense mechanism - the former suggests that a fair number of consumers still have qualms about the safety of online commerce. That uneasiness may stem in part from the fact that eight out of ten people assume that online criminals, shady characters who typically operate in countries where prosecution is unlikely, won't pay for their crimes.

When it comes to digital piracy, many people are willing to participate in online activities that are clearly illegal offline. While few of us would consider stealing a CD or DVD from a brick-and-mortar retailer, roughly 15 of 100 people think it's perfectly "legal" to download a movie, music track, or album without paying for it.

The anonymous nature of the Internet no doubt plays a large role in the public's attitude toward online piracy: It's okay to do it if you won't get caught.

On the plus side, nearly three of four people have learned not to share passwords (duh) or to open e-mail attachments from strangers. So efforts to educate the online masses are working - albeit at a gradual pace.

'Here You Have' Virus Tries to Delete Your Security Software

On Thursday, a new worm hit the Internet, and it s been spreading by

emailing the address books of infected users, according to McAfee Labs. By masquerading as a benign PDF, the worm looks something like this when it shows up in your inbox:

/ Subject: Here you have (or "Just for you") /

/ Body: This is The Document I told you about, you can find it /

/ Here. [link] /

/ Please check it and reply as soon as possible. /

/ Cheers,/

As you may have guessed, the URL doesn t actually take you to a PDF, but instead to an executable with the extension .scr. While the domain linked to in these infected e-mails is no longer live, infected computers can still be spreading virus messages. When the virus is run, it installs itself as CSRSS.EXE in the Windows directory, then e-mails the contents of your address book. It also spreads through mapped drives, remote machines, and removable media. The virus then attempts to download files and delete security software, including virus protection?

What can you do to prevent the spread of this virus? First off, don t click suspicious links in email, even if you know the sender. Second, have you updated your virus definitions lately? McAfee, Norton, and other security software companies have updated their definitions file to handle the "Here you have" worm.

Microsoft also offers free Security Essentials for Windows users, which helps protect against viruses, malware, and worms such as "Here you have". If you ve been infected, disconnect your machine from the Internet, install the latest version of an antivirus program on a removable drive, then use it to disinfect your machine.

Symantec Releases 2011 Norton Line

Symantec on Wednesday announced the release of Norton AntiVirus 2011 and Norton Internet Security 2011.

My hands-on evaluation showed that Norton AntiVirus 2011 continues to be a very effective tool for eliminating virus infestations and preventing new attacks by malicious software. Testing of Norton Internet Security 2011 is ongoing; PCMag will have a full review as soon as possible.

Independent testing labs like AV-Test.org, AV-Comparatives.org, and others consistently award their top ratings to Symantec’s Norton technology. In my own tests it scored a new high for malware removal. Others, in particular Webroot AntiVirus with Spy Sweeper 2011, scored higher in specific categories like rootkit and scareware removal. Norton Antivirus includes a full intrusion prevention system that’s more effective at identifying and blocking Web-based exploits than most full security suites. The 2011 edition enhances the main window with a new informational panel that offers information about world-wide malware protection and can also serve to track your Norton Online Backup account.

Norton Internet Security 2011 also boasts that new interactive panel and

gives it even more features. In addition to the threat map and Norton Backup tracking, it can optionally report on recent activity by Norton Safe Web or link to your OnlineFamily.Norton account. Both products offer a connection to Norton Safe Web for Facebook, a free Facebook app that checks the links in your News Feed and verifies that they're safe.

Modern threats, be they viruses, Trojans, or other malware, are constantly changing. A Trend Micro study found that the average threat exists unchanged for three days, and the median lifetime is just 15 minutes. Symantec's figures suggest the same conclusion - it reports that a specific malware variant, on average, infects 10 users, while the median is just one infection.

An antivirus that relies solely on signatures to block known threats will have trouble keeping up with these thousands of variants. Symantec's "Norton Insight" technology uses statistical techniques to focus attention on brand-new threats. It checks every program against a database drawn from the many millions of "Norton Community" members. A program that's been seen on 10,000 participating computers is clearly safer than a program see on just 10 - or just one. A program that's been in the database for months is safer than one seen for the first time today. Programs deemed suspicious by Norton Insight get closer scrutiny from other technologies including the behavior-based SONAR (Symantec Online Network for Advanced Response).

With the 2011 product line Symantec has also revamped its handling of tech support for pernicious malware that interferes with installing protection. Its support Web site emphasizes using the free Norton Power Eraser to fix the problem and de-emphasizes the paid spyware and virus removal service. In addition, at the end of every scan, Norton Antivirus and Norton Internet Security offer a link to Norton Power Eraser for users who think there still may be a problem.

Norton Power Eraser is an aggressive tool and might conceivably delete something it shouldn't. However, it won't touch known good programs identified by the Norton Insight database, and it includes an option to undo any changes.

Exploding Google Logo Means... What?

If the measure of a good logo is that it is memorable, Google is setting new records. On the day after Labor Day, the search giant is featuring a new variation on its well-known name in which the logo breaks up and runs from your cursor - and people are wondering why.

According to news reports, the new, interactive logo is only available to users in the U.S. and Britain. It shows the Google name in circles of color that disperse away from the tip of your cursor and then, as if on invisible elastic bands, bounce back to form the name when your the cursor is moved away.

The logo also does its thing if you grab the top bar and move the browser window.

Google has a tradition of modifying its logo to reflect a holiday or special occasion, like Halloween, the artist Rene Magritte's birthday, or the launch of the Hubble telescope, but this dynamically interactive

version takes the tradition to new dimensions. It is also sparking a great deal of commentary on the Web as to its meaning.

For one thing, the holiday-related logos often lead to an explanation when the logo is clicked, but that is not the case here - it’s literally not possible to click on the dispersing name.

Some commenters are suggesting it is related to Google’s date-of-incorporation birthday, which is September 7. The company was founded in 1998.

Others mention that the programming trick is a particle movement simulator, using Javascript. The company has previously honored science-related occasions, such as "doodles" on the logo that honored H.G. Well’s The War of the Worlds, on the occasion of his 143rd birthday. Perhaps Google is honoring some as-yet-unrevealed particle-related achievement?

Then there’s HTML5, which has become a hot topic because of Apple’s refusal to allow Adobe’s Flash technology on its iPad, iPod Touch, and iPhone devices. Instead, Apple has been pushing the still-developing, standards-based HTML5 and related technologies.

The particle movement simulator uses HTML5 and CSS along with JavaScript, so there is speculation this is a highly-visible demonstration of a neat interactive multimedia trick that standards-based technologies can do.

While the holiday-based custom logos are generally static, this isn’t the company’s first interactive logo. A falling apple logo graced the screen in January, on the occasion of the birthday of the most famous falling apple-watcher in history, Isaac Newton. A Pac-Man game-logo in the spring celebrated the 30th anniversary of that classic video game, and an interactive buckyball on Saturday celebrated the discovery of the carbon molecule named after visionary Buckminster Fuller.

Andrew Frank, Research Director at Garnter, said that, because their "logo is rendered most frequently on a Web page," the company doesn’t need to subscribe to the long-held marketing rule that "your logo is sacrosanct."

He pointed out that "this particular execution helps diffuse the conversation about the attack ads being run by a consumer group," protesting their highly criticized joint proposal with Verizon Wireless about Net Neutrality. The company is also under investigation in a number of countries for privacy laws violation, in relation to personal data obtained by their Street View vehicles.

Google Unveils Faster Internet Search

Search engine Google is giving Web users the thrill of speed with a new feature that displays suggested links as fast as a person can type.

After two days of teasingly tinkering with the Google logo, or "doodle", that tops its home page, the Californian company ended the mystery on Wednesday by unveiling "Google Instant" - a speedier route to Web search results.

As users type in a query, the Google search box suggests terms and shows

results for the top suggestion.

"Google Instant actually gets queries and gives you search results as you type and streams those results to your computer," Google vice president of search products and user experience Marissa Mayer said.

"We are actually predicting what query you are likely to do and giving you results for that. There is actually a psychic element to it," Mayer said at a press event in the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Instant began rolling out in the United States on Wednesday and would expand to Britain, France, Germany, Russia and three other countries during the course of the coming week, according to Mayer.

"We are really excited about what Google Instant could mean in terms of the evolution of search," she said, describing it as "a quantum leap forward" in search.

Google is putting finishing touches on a version of Instant for smartphones and other mobile devices and should release it in the next several months, according to Mayer.

"I think this is a piece of an ever-changing landscape of computing," said Google co-founder Sergey Brin. "Things coming out in the next decade from Google and other companies will really change the way we do computing."

Brin joked that he has started toying with saying "Google wants to be the third half of your brain."

As queries are typed, "auto-complete" software developed by Google engineers tries to predict the subjects of searches.

For example, when someone in Washington types the letter h in Google’s search line, the words Hotmail, Hulu and Home Depot immediately appear in a drop-down box. Continue writing "he," and those words are replaced with Hertz and Hershey Park.

The suggested links vary according to user location.

"You have to truly use Google and see for yourself to understand the power," Google Instant director of product management Johanna Wright said.

Brin credited software innovations in-house and faster, cheaper computer chips with making it possible for Google data centers to manage the leap in the amount of data handled by turning each search into an ever-evolving query.

"We did have to spend a lot more computer power on it, and it is really thanks to all of those advances in semiconductors and multi-core processors that we can do this," Brin said.

The new tool shaves seconds off searches at Google, which is used by more than a billion people monthly, and prides itself on the speed with which it finds what people seek on the Internet.

Search Engine Land website editor Danny Sullivan said Instant promised to add an "Oh wow!" effect to using the world’s most popular search engine.

"But it might also be annoying when it doesn’t get things right,"

Sullivan said. "I also think it wouldn’t be that hard for competitors to copy."

The Instant launch came shortly after Microsoft’s rival search engine Bing began handling online queries at Yahoo! Web pages in an alliance aimed at taking on Google.

"We think it is a great differentiator; search is going to be easier and more fun on Google," Mayer told AFP.

"We are really happy with how well this sets us apart from the competition."

Matt Rosoff of private analyst firm Directions On Microsoft doubted that Instant would make much difference in the battle for Internet search market share.

"It’s a nice improvement, but I can’t see it really changing the search game a lot," Rosoff said.

"It is sort of the same problem Bing has been facing: many people are really happy with their Google results and it is hard to improve on that."

Ripple effects of Instant are expected to be felt by websites that tailor designs or content to rank high in Google query results in a tactic called "search engine optimization."

"With Instant, people might not be as prone to finish a query and change search patterns," Rosoff said.

"It is a big change for companies trying to get listed in search results. Lots of companies make or lose millions of dollars based on search engine optimization and their Google strategy."

HTML5 May Help Web Pages Talk, Listen

Sometime in the near future, users might not only read Web pages but hold conversations with them as well, at least if a new activity group in the W3C (World Wide Consortium) bears fruit.

The W3C is investigating the possibility of incorporating voice recognition and speech synthesis interfaces within Web pages. A new incubator group will file a report a year from now summarizing the feasibility of adding voice and speech features into HTML, the W3C’s standard for rendering Web pages.

AT&T, Google, Microsoft and the Mozilla Foundation, among others, all have engineers participating in this effort.

The human voice and the Web are not strangers: Google includes a voice-based Web search app in its Android smartphone operating system and Microsoft promises robust voice-driven features in its upcoming Windows Phone 7.

The HTML Speech Incubator Group is studying the feasibility of developing a standard Web interface for both speech recognition and synthesis, said group chair Dan Burnett, who is also director of speech technologies and

standards at voice response system provider Voxeo.

Such an interface could be used across multiple browsers. Using built-in or plug-in voice recognition and speech synthesis engines, browsers could read pages aloud or permit users to audibly fill out Web forms.

While this work may overlap with another voice-based W3C effort, VoiceXML, the two efforts are somewhat different, Burnett said. VoiceXML wouldn't work very well for the Web, given that it was primarily designed for voice-driven applications, such as telephone-based voice response systems, where it is used widely. Like HTML itself, the voice capabilities of HTML would be stateless, or not require a dedicated session with the user.

Burnett noted that while the report would discuss the feasibility of establishing a set of interfaces, the work of developing the interfaces themselves, should they be warranted, would be taken on by another W3C group, such as the HTML Working Group.

The W3C has been busy with speech technologies on a number of other fronts as well. The organization also recently released version 3.0 of VoiceXML. In this new version, the working group added semantic descriptions of the features, and organized the functionality into modules.

The W3C also plans to shortly release version 1.1 of SSML (the Speech Synthesis Markup Language) - often used in conjunction with VoiceXML - that will incorporate Asian languages, and provide developers more flexibility with voice selection and handling of content in unexpected languages.

AOL's 'Safe Social' Monitors Your Kids Online

It seems that every day there's a new scam aimed at Facebook users, from rogue antivirus scams to clickjacking attacks. You're smart! You don't fall for these. But what about your kids? Without your background and life experience they're more gullible. The kids are more likely to fall for scans and to accept friend requests from the wrong people.

AOL has just announced a new service called AOL Safe Social. Powered by SocialShield it gives parents what they're calling a "360-degree view" of children's online activities. $9.99 per month covers all of your kids.

This is no sneaky spy program; it requires "up-front consent from the child". Parents get a look at the child's data on major social networks including Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. The service offers real-time alerts when it detects communication suggesting cyberbullying, suicidal tendencies, and other worries. It also checks all "friends" to make sure none are known predators or frauds. Parents can view all photos posted by kids and photos in which kids are tagged.

Competitor SafetyWeb also tracks children's social media accounts, photos, and friends. It specifically targets cyberbullying, with real-time alerts for parents.

Putting these products through a full evaluation would take more time than I can offer them just now, but both have free trial offers. If you're concerned about possible dangers in your children's social media interactions you can give both services a try and see if they suit your needs.

Tablets Threaten to Make Netbooks Obsolete

Analysts predict that Apple alone could sell 28 million iPad tablets in 2011. That doesn't even take the Samsung Galaxy Tab, or the rest of the upcoming tablets expected in the next few months into consideration, and doesn't bode well for other mobile computing platforms. The netbook in particular will be the primary victim of the rise of the tablet, and will quickly be rendered obsolete.

The primary advantages of a netbook - when compared with larger notebook computers - are size, weight, and battery life. Netbooks are more diminutive and manage to squeeze the guts of the computer into a case generally smaller than a sheet of paper and not much thicker than a standard paperback novel when closed.

With the smaller physical dimensions comes a significantly lower weight as well. The average weight of netbooks ranges from two to four pounds, or about half the weight of many notebook computers. A handicap of the netbook is that it lacks an internal DVD drive in order to make the smaller case and lighter weight possible.

One of the biggest advantages of a netbook, though, is the extended battery life. While notebooks may last only a couple hours on a fully-charged battery, a netbook can typically make it through a full business day on a single charge.

However, the biggest draw of netbooks is arguably price. With prices starting in the $200 range, and netbooks available from wireless carriers with subsidized pricing as low as $50 in exchange for a commitment to a data plan, netbooks provide a much cheaper point of entry than the traditional notebook or desktop PCs.

That explains the lure or a netbook when compared to a notebook, but how does the netbook stack up against the tablet? Well, the answer to that question is largely subjective and introduces a new question: what are you looking for in a mobile computing platform?

Some will argue that the netbook still holds an advantage in that it has USB ports, larger hard drive storage capacity, and a full operating system. All of those are advantages, or possibly even deal-breakers depending on what your mobile computing needs are. The ability to simply install and run the various software applications used on a standard Windows PC rather than having to adapt to a mobile OS app culture has its benefits.

The Apple iPad has a larger footprint than many netbooks, but because it is a flat-panel form factor the thickness is less. At only half an inch thick, and weighing it at a pound and a half, the iPad bests netbooks in the size and weight categories.

The iPad boasts up to 10 hours of battery life - superior to all but the most elite netbooks. The flat touchscreen interface is much more suited for computing on the go than the netbook form factor that requires folding the computer open and involves two hands for most tasks.

With prices that start at $499 for the base model, though, the iPad is

significantly more expensive than most netbooks. However, an armada of tablets is on the horizon built on Android, WebOS, and even Windows 7 - and those may have lower prices, or use the carrier-subsidy model familiar to smartphones and netbooks now.

Some aspects of the tablet require users to adapt to new ways of embracing mobile computing, and a culture shift from looking at it as just another portable computer form factor. That said, tablets offer most, if not all, of the advantages of netbooks, and add in some new benefits as well, making it a more compelling mobile computing platform than netbooks in many cases, and making the concept of the netbook somewhat obsolete.

Judge Allows Subpoenas for Internet Users

A federal judge on Friday allowed the holder of a movie copyright to subpoena the names of people accused of illegally downloading and distributing a film over the Internet.

Courts have held that Internet subscribers do not have an expectation of privacy once they convey subscriber information to their Internet service providers, U.S. District Judge Rosemary Collyer ruled.

Collyer denied motions by some computer users to quash subpoenas for subscriber information.

The decision came in the case of a German limited partnership which is suing some Internet users for copyright infringement of the movie "Far Cry," a video game adaptation.

Achte/Neunte Boll Kino Beteiligungs Gmbh & Co KG, a creator and distributor of motion pictures, holds an exclusive license to the copyright of "Far Cry" in which two reporters investigate the deaths of mercenaries on an island off the coast of the Pacific Northwest.

The partnership identified the Internet protocol addresses of computers associated with the alleged infringement. It then subpoenaed the Internet service providers seeking names of individuals associated with those addresses. Notified by their provider, some of the customers challenged the subpoenas.

Freed Journalist Tricked Captors Into Twitter Access

A Japanese journalist freed over the weekend by captors in Afghanistan managed to send two Twitter messages before his release while teaching a captor how to access the Internet on a new cell phone, he said Tuesday.

Kosuke Tsuneoka, a freelance journalist, was released from five months of captivity on Saturday. His freedom came a day after the first messages since his disappearance were posted to his Twitter account.

"i am still allive [sic], but in jail," read a message sent at 1:15 p.m. GMT on Friday. It was followed a few minutes later with a second message, also in English, that read, "here is archi in kunduz. in the jail of commander lativ." The message referred to the Dasht-e-Archi district of

Kunduz where he was being held.

Tsuneoka hadn’t been heard from since disappearing on April 1, so the messages gave hope to family and friends, but were also greeted with skepticism by some who questioned aspects of them.

Why were they sent in English when Tsuneoka had been using only Japanese on his Twitter account? Why were they sent through Twitter’s mobile Web interface when previous messages had been sent using the Gravity Twitter cell phone client? And how was he managing to post messages if he was in prison?

On Tuesday, speaking in Tokyo, Tsuneoka answered these questions and revealed how he managed to convince his captors to give him access to the Internet.

It began three days earlier when one of his captors, whom he identified as a low-ranking soldier, was showing him a new cell phone. The phone, a Nokia N70, is advanced compared to what many are using in Afghanistan and the soldier didn’t know how to use it.

"He asked me if I knew how to use it, so I had a look and explained it to him," said Tsuneoka.

The soldier had heard of the Internet, but he didn’t know what it was. When Tsuneoka mentioned it to him, he was eager to see it, but the phone wasn’t signed up to receive the carrier’s GPRS data service for accessing the Internet.

"I called the customer care number and activated the phone," he said. Soon after he had the captor’s phone configured for Internet access.

"Once I told them I was able to access, they said ’how do you use it?’, ’can we see Al Jazeera?’." Tsuneoka said he explained they just needed to type "Al Jazeera" into Google search to access the Qatar-based TV news network’s website.

"But if you are going to do anything, you should use Twitter," he said he told them. "They asked what that was. And I told them that if you write something on it, then you can reach many Japanese journalists. So they said, ’try it’."

"I don’t think they realize they were tricked," he said.

Did E-mail and The Internet Kill The 9-5 Workday?

Have you checked your work e-mail today? If you’re like most employees in the United States and United Kingdom, the answer is yes despite the fact that it is not only the weekend, but an extended holiday weekend for most workers in the US. A day off is becoming an increasingly foreign concept as workers stay connected virtually 24/7.

The concepts of the workday and the weekend are engrained in pop culture. Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton starred in the movie "9 to 5", named for the then-standard workday hours. In 1981, the rock group Loverboy had a hit with the song "Working for the Weekend". The phrase "thank god it’s Friday" and its acronym equivalent "TGIF" are virtually ubiquitous

celebrations of the impending weekend.

Unfortunately, pop culture trivia may be the only place left where the workday and weekend have any meaning. A survey conducted by Harris Interactive in the United States and Opinion Matters in the United Kingdom on behalf of Xobni, found that the 9-5 workday is a myth, and that there is no such thing as a real day off any more.

Xobni reports that 72 percent of Americans, and 68 percent of Brits check work e-mail outside of regular business hours. Half of the Americans surveyed check e-mail while on vacation. Just over a quarter of the British respondents, and 42 percent of the Americans admitted checking e-mail even while out on sick days. Many even check e-mail while in bed before going to sleep or getting up in the morning.

So, what is driving the e-mail obsession? Are workers anxiously waiting for something in particular? Do they simply love their jobs so much they don't know when to quit? Well, not quite. It seems to be more a mix between job preservation, and simply trying to manage the tremendous burden over a broader stretch of time. The rise of mobile e-mail on smartphones and tablet devices doesn't hurt any either.

In an era where job cuts and layoffs are the norm, those who still have jobs are likely to work twice as hard for two reasons. First, they want to be an asset to the company and demonstrate value to avoid being one of the unemployed. Second, someone still has to do all of the work previously done by those who were let go - so the workers who are left are simply expected to do more.

It's not all bad news, though. The advent of the Internet and e-mail have also opened the door and leveled the playing field for freelance workers. "Businesses are leveraging online talent as a core strategy to get work done and are finding that there is a significant supply of highly qualified professionals who prefer the online work model. Freelancers are finding satisfaction in controlling their own schedules and following their passions and are opting for a cloud commute in record numbers," said Ellen Pack, Vice President of Marketing at Elance.

While it's easy to assume that "freelance" is simply a polite way of saying "unemployed and taking odd jobs where possible" a survey of freelancers conducted by Elance found "the economic downturn is not the primary driver for professionals turning to freelance careers. Only 4 percent of those surveyed are working as a freelancer until they can find a full-time job and less than a quarter (24 percent) transitioned to freelance careers after a layoff. More than half (56 percent) began freelancing to be their own boss and work on projects they love.

There is still a relationship between the down economy and the rise of freelancing, though. As companies reduce their internal workforce, the opportunities for hiring outside talent on a project by project basis helps get the job done without all of the overhead associated with hiring a full-time employee.

Google, Verizon and the FCC: Inside the War Over the Internet's Future

At approximately 3:30 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 5, Federal Communications Commission Chief of Staff Edward Lazarus walked into a conference room

where his boss, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, was meeting with public interest groups discussing federal broadband policy.

The chairman turned to his chief of staff and asked him to update the room on the ongoing broadband regulation talks between Verizon, AT&T, Google, Skype and the Open Internet Coalition, a Web industry group.

"Eddie looked like he had just lost his best friend," according to a person who was present and recalled the expression on Lazarus's face. Addressing the gathering, Lazarus announced that the talks had been terminated - he would later say "suspended" - explaining that the negotiators had found a number of points of agreement but had failed to reach a consensus.

What was at stake in the Lazarus talks? No less than the future of the Internet, with wide-ranging ramifications for the delivery of broadband content and services to the home - not to mention hospitals, banks and mobile devices.

As Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Google forge ahead with highly publicized new plans to stream high-speed content like movies and TV shows to your living room, smartphone, telecom and cable giants like AT&T, Verizon and Comcast have been intensely lobbying to maintain control over the broadband pipes they spent billions to build. Comcast is going so far as to buy a rich content factory, NBC Universal, a deal that would create a $35 billion media and delivery juggernaut. That merger is currently pending before the FCC, and though public interest groups have been roundly critical, it's expected to be approved.

An epic and escalating war is now taking place over the next era of broadband content delivery. Some skirmishes are playing out in the public eye, but others - perhaps the most critical - are far removed from it. In fact, very few people know that the highly controversial efforts by Google and Verizon to hammer out their own proposal for a broadband policy framework - news of which broke only last month - started nearly two years ago. The outcome of this ever-hotter war will have a profound impact on the way consumers access information well into the future.

Just hours earlier on that August Thursday, Lazarus had assured the participants that his talks were moving ahead and making progress, according to sources familiar with the meetings. But when news emerged (in the form of a New York Times article that appeared online late Wednesday and in the Thursday newspaper) that two of the key participants, Verizon and Google, were on the verge of announcing their own proposal, the talks collapsed. It was a plan that Lazarus - not to mention Skype or the Open Internet Coalition - was not prepared to accept.

Google and Verizon disputed the Times article, insisting that they were pitching a policy proposal not a business deal, as the article described it. But it was clear that Lazarus's approach had hit a wall. ""We hadn't gotten consensus on any of the issues, and everything was contingent on everything else."" "We had exhausted the Lazarus process," a participant in the talks told DailyFinance. "We had reached an impasse, and the decision to suspend the meetings was the right decision. We hadn't gotten consensus on any of the issues, and everything was contingent on everything else. The toughest issues were managed services and wireless broadband, and how you treat them."

Prior to working at the FCC, Lazarus, a former law clerk for Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, had spent most of the decade as a partner at legal powerhouse Akin Gump in Los Angeles. He has written extensively on various

legal issues, and when Lazarus promoted his book Closed Chambers on The Daily Show in 2006, host Jon Stewart asked him about the need for complex legal jargon. Lazarus replied: "Do you know how much I charge on an hourly basis, Jon? If I didn't make up my own language, why would people pay me?"

For Lazarus (pictured at right), the closed-door meetings were a bold, high-stakes gamble to bring together the polarized sides of the frequently acrimonious debate over net neutrality - the basic idea that Internet broadband providers shouldn't pick winners on the Web or discriminate against rival content. During a speech in Aspen just three weeks ago, Verizon policy chief Tom Tauke said: "The elephant that is still in the room is the issue that has dominated debate in this industry for at least five years, and that is net
neutrality."

The Internet today largely operates under the principle of net neutrality, which most people don't even notice, so it's easy to take for granted. But all Web users and companies have equal access to the Internet, in the same way that all Americans have the right to take a road trip anywhere in the 50 states without a passport. Companies and institutions have closed networks, but the main public internet is accessible by all.

Without this open access, net neutrality advocates argue, startups like Google, Twitter and untold thousands of others could never have taken hold. Indeed, innovation online would be grievously stifled. For the last five years, Internet-dependent companies like Google and Skype have been fighting a series of running battles with the giant broadband providers over how net neutrality should be enshrined - if at all - in regulation and law moving forward.

Lazarus is a relative newcomer to the net neutrality debate. It appears he wanted to broker a deal he could hand to Congress on a silver platter heading into a contentious midterm election. Instead, he got a busted process, two rogue participants, furious interest groups and an agency in near-disarray, at least on broadband policy. "The chairman remains fully committed to preserving the free and open Internet as a platform for investment, innovation, free speech and consumer choice," a senior FCC official tells DailyFinance. The FCC declined to make Lazarus available for an interview.

Lazarus was scrambling to find a solution to the grave jurisdictional crisis the FCC faced after a federal judge ruled in April that the agency lacked the authority to enforce net neutrality - a verdict that rocked tech policy circles from D.C. to Hollywood. The court said the FCC had no power to enforce four principles laid down in 2004 by then-FCC Chairman Michael Powell that are the basis for net neutrality. Powell's successor, Kevin Martin, tried to use those principles in 2008 to sanction cable giant Comcast for slowing down peer-to-peer traffic - an ultimately botched pseudo-regulatory action with far-reaching and unintended consequences.

But behind the scenes, two of the biggest and most important companies in technology and telecommunications, Google and Verizon, grew tired of waiting for the feds to act amid the regulatory and legal morass surrounding net neutrality and broadband policy. So, they got together and put a tangible broadband policy compromise on the table. In the process, the companies inadvertently pulled back the curtain on what could be the most ineffectual regulatory agency in Washington - the FCC.

Although news of the Google-Verizon proposal emerged last month, the two companies have actually been working together on policy efforts to a greater degree and for longer than they've admitted publicly. In the fall of 2008, nearly two years before the Lazarus talks blew up, two top Verizon policy officials, Tauke and Link Hoewing, Verizon's VP of Internet and tech policy, happened to be in the Bay Area attending a tech conference, when they decided to pay a call at Google.

Traditional adversaries - at least when it came to net neutrality - Verizon and Google seemed like unlikely future allies.

Initially, the two companies' courtship was nurtured by the friendship between Alan Davidson (pictured at right), Google's with-it public-policy chief, and Hoewing, who has worked with Tauke to craft Verizon's policy strategy. This friendship predated Davidson's arrival at Google, going back to his stint at the Center for Democracy and Technology, where he was known as something of a savvy libertarian. Had Davidson and Hoewing, two of the brightest tech policy minds in D.C., not already been friends, the controversial deal that rocked Internet circles and made headlines everywhere might never have happened.

By 2008, Verizon had been slowly coming around to the ideas of openness that Google espoused - at least relative to some of its fellow telecom giants, like AT&T. "Verizon has had a history of being forward-looking on a lot of Internet policy issues," says a top Internet industry source. "They've taken a strong stance on free-speech issues and were among the first to really start thinking about themselves as a broadband company."

Earlier in 2008, Verizon had agreed to pay $4.7 billion for the highly coveted 700 Mhz C Block in a closely watched FCC wireless spectrum auction and in doing so also agreed to abide by open-access provisions set by the FCC for that chunk of spectrum. (Those provisions mean subscribers can use any compatible phone and software and aren't locked into a single device, like Apple's iPhone.)

Google had craftily triggered the open-access provisions by meeting the FCC's $4.6 billion reserve bid. In a savvy strategic move, Google was bidding to lose - or rather, bidding to trigger the provisions - although Google execs later said the company would have ponied up the $4.6 billion for the spectrum had it actually won. But Verizon Wireless, the nation's largest mobile carrier, would never have allowed Google to buy nearly $5 billion worth of wireless spectrum outright. So, it outbid Google* *and accepted the FCC's open-access provisions.

It's taken nearly three years, but that chunk of 700 Mhz C Block spectrum is now Verizon 4G - the company's next generation of superfast wireless broadband - and it's about to be rolled out, with the open-access provisions intact, company officials say.

On their 2008 visit to the Bay Area, Verizon's Tauke and Hoewing ended up having a day-long series of meetings at Google's Mountain View, Calif., campus. It was the initial foray in what would become a nearly-two-year odyssey to see if the two companies could find common ground on net neutrality. About a year later, Google and Verizon quietly filed paperwork with the FCC, outlining some areas of agreement after the talks had gained momentum in the summer of 2009. Another filing followed in early 2010.

In March, Google CEO Eric Schmidt and Verizon CEO Ivan Seidenberg wrote an op-ed in The Wall Street Journal in which they pledged to work together

and said that although "our two companies don’t agree on every issue, we do agree generally as a matter of policy that the framework of minimal government involvement should continue." And of course, their talks gained greater urgency after the FCC lost the Comcast decision in April 2010.

"Google and Amazon and others have moved closer to the middle on the net neutrality debate," says a source familiar with the Google-Verizon partnership. "Verizon needs to have some predictability to continue investing. Google knows that it needs the telecom sector to make massive investment. And both companies need to keep consumers happy."

The conventional wisdom was that Google and Verizon would do little more than talk.

But three weeks ago, Google and Verizon finally dropped the bombshell they had been crafting, on and off, since October 2008. Essentially, the framework would ensure net neutrality on wired networks, meaning no traffic-blocking or discrimination against any content or rival. However, the proposal would not require net neutrality on wireless networks, which is apostasy to the principle’s backers. Their deal would also create an ambiguous category of "managed services," a nonpublic, superfast network that companies could use to deliver prioritized content - for a price - something also fundamentally antithetical to hardcore net neutrality advocates.

""Was the Google-Verizon proposal the only reason the talks failed? No. Was it the straw that broke the camel’s back? Yes."" When Lazarus finally called off the talks in August, he was about to leave for vacation anyway, according to multiple sources. But he and the other meeting participants had known for months about the separate discussion between Google and Verizon. Although those two had struck their own deal, the other parties, including AT&T and Skype, still remained far apart on the key issues. There was really no reason for them to continue negotiating when two of their peers had struck their own pact. Besides that, the telecom and cable companies weren’t budging from their stance of no net neutrality on wireless networks nor from their insistence on "managed services," and those were positions the Open Internet Coalition and the FCC itself simply couldn’t accept.

"Until the network operators start feeling that policymakers and elected officials won’t support their position that there will be no rules on wireless services or specialized services, I don’t see their position changing unilaterally," says Markham Erickson, the respected tech policy lawyer who led the Open Internet Coalition at the Lazarus talks.

"Was the Google-Verizon proposal the only reason the talks failed? No," says Gigi Sohn, president and co-founder of Public Knowledge, a D.C.-based pro-net neutrality advocacy group. "Was it the straw that broke the camel’s back? Yes."

Former FCC Chairman Michael Powell knows very well how important the concept of net neutrality is. He was a George W. Bush-appointee who served as FCC chairman from 2001 to 2005, and it was his initial four principles that form the policy basis for the current net neutrality debate. Looking at the situation that the FCC is dealing with, Powell now says: "Genachowski has an enormous challenge, and he has to assert himself forcefully. The chairman has a problem in that his jurisdictional basis is unclear and confused. But that’s why we have a Congress, and they should absolutely fix this problem and stop the confusion."

Powell disapproves of the FCC moving ahead to reclassify without Congress: "I don't think it's an appropriate position to say we [the FCC] may not have the authority, but we think Congress may take too long, so we're going to create it for ourselves."

As chairman, Powell pushed for what became known as the "four freedoms" throughout 2004 and 2005:

* Freedom to access content. Consumers should have access to their choice of legal content.
* Freedom to use applications. Consumers should be able to run applications of their choice.
* Freedom to attach personal devices. Consumers should be permitted to attach any devices they choose to the connection in their homes.
* Freedom to obtain service plan information. Consumers should receive meaningful information regarding their service plans.

The lost Comcast decision meant the FCC lacked jurisdiction over broadband and thus could not enforce the four freedoms or any other type of openness or net neutrality regulation. The decision threw the agency's ambitious National Broadband Plan into chaos because Genachowski has proposed adding two additional two principles - one formalizing nondiscrimination, the essence of strong net neutrality, the other extending the principle to wireless networks -- to Powell's original four. The ruling put the chairman in a serious bind.

Genchowski did have one immediate option, what some referred to as "the nuclear option." That was to simply reclassify broadband Internet from a Title I "information" service to a Title II "communications" service, which would give the commission the needed regulatory authority to enforce net neutrality. Of the five FCC commissioners, Michael Copps and Mignon Clyburn, were ready to vote for immediate Title II reclassification, according to sources with knowledge of the matter. Genachowski would have been the third and deciding vote, but the chairman chose to hold off.

Such wholesale reclassification is unacceptable to the telecom and cable companies because they claim it would introduce the possibility of increased litigation and price controls, among other things. Instead, Genachowski tried to thread the needle, proposing something he called "the third way" - or "Title II lite" - as an alternative to standing around toothless after being knocked out in the Comcast case or taking the major step of full Title II reclassification. The chairman has garnered support for this position, if not wholehearted plaudits for the pace of his action.

"We're in favor of the third way," says Sohn of Public Knowledge. "And we're willing to accept the chairman's political calculation that [the FCC waits] until after the election. As long as he moves after the election, then we're fine."

"We are also hopeful for legislation, and we will exercise some patience there as well," Sohn adds. "But if there's no legislation after the election, the chairman has to move forward with reclassification because consumers can't wait any longer for protection and be left without a cop on the beat."

"All options remain on the table," a senior FCC official tells DailyFinance. "The FCC staff is busy reviewing and analyzing an extensive

record of more than 50,000 comments in the broadband framework proceeding, which only closed a few weeks ago. Securing a solid legal foundation for broadband policy is too important an issue to rush."

As a presidential candidate, then-Senator Barack Obama sensed the importance of an open Internet, and he pledged to make broadband deployment, innovation and investment a centerpiece of his economic agenda. In November 2007, during a speech at Google's Mountain View headquarters, Obama declared his strong support for net neutrality in unambiguous terms before a packed house, with many Googlers standing.

"I will take a backseat to no one in my commitment to network neutrality," Obama declared, "because once providers start to privilege some applications or websites over others, then the smaller voices get squeezed out, and we all lose. The Internet is perhaps the most open network in history, and we have to keep it that way.

"We could see the Internet get divided up by the highest bidders," Obama warned. "We have to ensure free and full exchange of information, and that starts with an open Internet." After the speech, Google CEO Eric Schmidt thanked Obama for "such a strong message about innovation."

During the presidential campaign, Sascha Meinrath, now 36, was part of Obama's idealistic technology, media and telecom working group - led by Genachowski - that included young tech policy stars such as Alec Ross and Ben Scott, both now at the State Dept., as well as former FCC-staffer Blair Levin, among others. Meinrath is currently director of the New America Foundation's Open Technology Initiative and a top telecom policy expert and pro-net neutrality advocate - another wunderkind of progressive tech policy activism. The New America Foundation is a relatively new, nonprofit center-progressive D.C. think tank run by Steve Coll, a Pulitzer Prize-winning former star at the Washington Post. Google CEO Schmidt is the foundation's chairman.

Nearly three years after the heady idealism of then-candidate Obama's tech, media and telecom working group, Meinrath (pictured at right) has become one of Genechowski's toughest critics. He says the FCC has failed to carry out Obama's vision by dragging its feet, cowering to both industry and Congress and generally delaying real action, despite some lofty rhetoric.

Meinrath isn't the only such critic. An emerging consensus among both public interest groups and progressive think thanks asserts that Genachowski has so far been a bust. "The FCC continues to kick the can down the road and prolong this process, but the longer the FCC ponders the politics of net neutrality, the longer consumers are left unprotected," Free Press Research Director S. Derek Turner said in a recent statement. "It is time for the FCC to stop writing notices and start making clear rules of the road. The phone and cable companies have shown us what the Internet will look like if they are allowed to write their own rules and build a two-tiered Internet with fast and slow lanes and zero protections on mobile broadband. We don't need more questions from the FCC, we need more answers."

Not surprisingly, some young GOP-allied telecom lobbyists have been overheard celebrating the public interest groups' distress in D.C. bars in recent weeks.

"When Genachowski became chairman of the FCC, many of us thought that this was a fantastic opportunity to implement the telecom agenda he had

already signed off on," Meinrath says. "Which begs the question: What happened? Was there some sort of political math done where people realized that fixing telecom requires angering powerful constituencies? Why, now that he's chairman of the FCC, has Genachowski failed to implement so much of the agenda that he supported? Why has the Obama administration refused to hold Genachowski publicly accountable for his failure to act?"

Genachowski (pictured at left) is clearly ambitious. A former Internet executive for media mogul Barry Diller's IAC conglomerate, Genachowski is an old Harvard Law School chum of President Obama's - and someone who genuinely cares about broadband issues and development. But he's also learned a few things about politics.

After leading Obama's tech media and telecom policy working group, Genachowski initially aimed high, hoping to be named the nation's first chief technology officer, when that was a Cabinet-level position, according to multiple sources. When the CTO job was downgraded, he became the front-runner to head the FCC.

"Over the years, I've worked with multiple chairmen, including Michael Powell and Kevin Martin, and Genachowski is by far the worst to work with," says Meinrath of his former boss on the working group. "Powell's and Martin's doors were open to us on a regular basis, even when we disagreed. That has all but ceased under the Genachowski administration."

The FCC today is "in endless process," Meinrath says, adding that "the opportunity costs of this failure to act are staggering - in the tens to hundreds of billions of dollars a year. So, drawing out the telecom reform decision-making process is causing substantial harm to our economy: lost jobs, lost revenue and lost productivity."

Privately, some FCC officials have grumbled about an election-year, hyperpolitical Congress and lack of support from the Obama team. Others have even suggested that White House has pressured the FCC - an independent agency - to ratchet back on net neutrality for political reasons. Meinrath is among those making such claims. "Multiple senior FCC officials pressure have said in meetings where I was present that they've received pressure from the White House and from Capitol Hill to slow down on the National Broadband Plan and net neutrality," he says plainly. The FCC declined to comment on this allegation.

""If you're going to start a fire, you better be ready to deal with it."" But others say the current and recent White Houses rarely meddle too heavily in FCC matters, especially this administration, which is dealing with a crippled economy, war and now the Middle East peace process. "The White House has real limitations on what they can do to influence the agency," says a former FCC official. "They don't pick up the phone and tell an independent agency what to do. To a White House, the FCC is a place they don't want to be bothered with. They expect a chairman to take care of business over there."

"But they've badly mismanaged this issue," this former official adds. "If you're going to start a fire, you better be ready to deal with it."

Or as another former FCC official puts it more bluntly: "When you're a regulator in D.C., you can do two things: Go along to get along, or try to do something, which could lead to a shit-storm. Genachowski has managed to do basically nothing -- and create a shit-storm."

The inaction that has left Genachowski with such a mess is partly what drove Google and Verizon to seek out their separate peace on net neutrality.

While Google and Verizon insist that their initiative isn’t a business project, they do have close ties, especially through their partnership on the Android mobile operating system, which Verizon has embraced successfully with hit products like the Droid smartphone, which it has used to combat Apple’s wildly popular iPhone. And the Google-Verizon proposal certainly isn’t a cut-and-dry Android business partnership. As Tauke’s and Hoewing’s fall 2008 meetings at Google demonstrate, the two sides were looking for common ground well before Verizon’s Droid rollout.

The first two components of the Google-Verizon plan - net neutrality for wired networks and no net neutrality for wireless networks -- are fairly straightforward. The first point represents an apparent victory for net neutrality advocates - openness, choice and nondiscrimination on the Internet, period. "It would be hard to imagine a major telecom company agreeing to this even six months ago," says a person familiar with the deal, adding that this point has gotten overwashed by the more controversial elements.

Net neutrality advocates have been hoping to extend the nondiscrimination principle to wireless services, and in fact, Genachowski proposed it last fall. But the wireless carriers have been fiercely opposed. It’s a matter of physics, they say.

""Spectrum is very limited because so many people can be using it in a given cell site."" "When you get into wireless, you’re talking about changing the power levels as people move through a cell site and scheduling packets when the connections are most capable," Verizon’s Hoewing told DailyFinance in a recent interview. "So we’re constantly managing network traffic in order to reasonably assure good services over the network. Spectrum is very limited because so many people can be using it in a given cell site."

Hoewing says Verizon’s proposal calls for more transparency from the carriers with respect to speeds and how networks are managed. "We’re going to be ensuring that the consumer knows the real speeds they can expect to get. We’ve got do a better job with that."

Given the urgent need to free more wireless spectrum, this is a legitimate issue for wireless providers. AT&T can’t even keep up with the voracious data demands of its iPhone and iPad users. Most everyone agrees that the U.S. needs to deploy more wireless spectrum, but that takes time, money and infrastructure.

However, it’s the third component of the Google-Verizon proposal, the mysterious "managed services" provision, that has proved most confusing and has the most controversial and potentially long-lasting implications.

In essence, Google and Verizon are proposing a separate "managed services" network apart from the "public Internet," where nondiscrimination wouldn’t apply and where wealthy companies would be able to buy huge chunks of bandwidth and superfast connections. Some of the benign-sounding uses Google and Verizon have mentioned as managed services are things like high-speed, secure networks for medical or banking data. Managed services would be a faster, paid alternative to the public Internet, kind of like ultra-premium cable for the rich.

"We studiously avoided defining managed services to encourage innovation and because we don’t know what these services are right now," Hoewing told me. "We define what they are not. They are not broadband Internet access that complies with the consumer protection principles where you can go anywhere, use any application, connect any device, and that would include the nondiscrimination principle. They are different but can use Internet content and [Internet protocol] technologies. They are an additional service, and we can’t try to pass them off as being the public internet. The FCC would have the authority to look at managed services and send an emergency report to Congress if necessary."

Google’s participation in such a proposal shocked many net neutrality supporters, who had long seen the search giant as one of their most powerful allies. Meinrath has an explanation for that turnabout: "Google wants to bolster its standing with Verizon because Google wants Verizon to be the platform for it’s iPad-killer tablet and Google video."

""I think Google is schizophrenic. Its success is due to the open nature of the Internet."" Does that mean Google is evil? "I think Google is schizophrenic," Meinrath says. "Google’s success is due to the open nature of the Internet. It’s unlikely that it ever would have gotten off the ground had the dominant players locked in prioritization for their own services in the late 1990s."

Meinrath adds: "Eric Schmidt is a very smart man. Now that Google is the dominant market player, he’s looking at the dollars that could come from a fourth, Google-centric, addition of a triple play [phone, TV, Internet] home package. This fourth ’Google service package’ would generate huge amounts of money, but it would also undermine the best-effort Internet and would create a discriminatory regime prejudiced toward supporting the largest corporate players and undermining new competitors and innovators."

For the record, Google officials from Schmidt on down have publicly and privately insisted that the company remains committed to what Schmidt has lately taken to calling the "public Internet." At least for now, Google officials are are dismissing the suggestion that Google could, say, roll out a high-speed movie-rental service based on YouTube for Verizon FiOS customers as a "managed service." The public internet is just fine for us, thank you very much.

But the concerns don’t stop there, Meinrath says. "All of this is before you even get into applications that have mixed-media uses - the next generations of World of Warcraft and collaborative office suites that combine instant messaging with video, voice or gaming all integrated in the same application," he says. "So the so-called ’policy framework’ that Google and Verizon propose requires that we either eliminate privacy and have a deep packet inspection regime across the board, or that we build a new broadband infrastructure for rich corporations who will then extract the cost of this redundant buildout from their customers."

Google knew that a backlash would come - and boy, did it - but the company’s compromise on wireless and managed services was made at least a bit more palatable by the fact that Google’s $4.6 billion bid for that 700 Mhz C Block that Verizon wound up buying triggered the open-access provisions for using that spectrum. So, we now have the curious situation that while the Google-Verizon proposal doesn’t require net neutrality for wireless networks, Verizon Wireless is preparing to roll out 4G wireless service under open-access provisions - a service that

will likely power millions of Google Android-equipped devices.

Nice trick. Clearly, it was a significant coup for Google to be able to achieve a deal with Verizon while still being able to enjoy the benefits of the telecom’s open 4G network. In short, Google gets to have it both ways, so it shouldn’t be surprised that Meinrath accuses it and Verizon of adopting a "for thee, but not for me" position.

""But while a Google-Verizon partnership may start out as a joint agreement, it won’t end up that way."" "Google wants to be able to use Verizon’s new C Block band, which contains an open-device mandate, to sell its services," Meinrath charges. "But while a Google-Verizon partnership may start out as a joint agreement, it won’t end up that way. Either Google will get a leg up on Verizon and take them over and crush them, or Verizon will do the same thing. Without regulations preventing these sorts of mergers and acquisitions, there’s no equilibrium point in telecom. Either Verizon or Google will take control, with the possibility being that Google would become either a telecom subsidiary or a telecom network owner."

That’s a bold claim, but pro net-neutrality advocates feel betrayed by Google, and by the FCC and President Obama -- all perceived as friendly forces only one short year ago. And they’re angry. "Our erstwhile allies are causing serious damage," says Meinrath. "It appears that the White House is perfectly happy with the status quo since they have not put any public pressure on the FCC to actually fulfill Obama’s campaign promises to reform telecommunications and foster both an open Internet and a competitive media environment. As a growing consensus now believes, since the White House has refused to weigh in, they must be happy with Genachowski’s inaction."

Since the "suspension" of the Lazarus talks, many parties have moved the Washington discussions across town to the K Street offices of the Information Technology Industry Council, an industry organization that lobbies the government on behalf of a wide variety of tech giants, including Microsoft, Oracle, Apple, Hewlett-Packard and Dell. ITIC Chairman Dean Garfield has been in touch with Lazarus, according to several sources, and the FCC issued a muted statement of quasi-support for the talks, which do not include Google - still smarting over the wicked PR hit it took over the Verizon proposal - or the Open Internet Coalition.

"These are no longer net neutrality talks," says Meinrath. "These are mega-corporations talking to other mega-corporations about how they should carve up the Internet."

Giving critics who see the FCC taking a go-slow approach to this firestorm even more ammunition, just last week, the FCC issued a notice seeking further public comment clarifying several issues before it makes any decision, ensuring that nothing will happen until after the November elections. "If the goal is to keep talking about change with ever acting, then Genachowski has been a major success for the Obama administration," says Meinrath. "But if President Obama is serious about upholding his campaign pledge, he should tell Chairman Genachowski to either act or resign."

That may not be such an extreme position, considering what’s at stake in this war: the future of the Internet.

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.